

California. Committee to investigate date of discovery  
of gold in California

# The Discovery of Gold in California



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1919 Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 25.

## CHAPTER 69.

*Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 25—Relative to the date of the discovery of gold in California by James W. Marshall.*

WHEREAS, The legislature at the forty-second session, by Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 15, did authorize the governor of the State of California to appoint a committee to investigate and to determine the correct date of the discovery of gold in California by James W. Marshall and to recommend corrections in the inscription on the monument erected at Coloma, El Dorado county, to the memory of James W. Marshall and in commemoration of the discovery of gold in California; and

WHEREAS, Philip Baldwin Bekeart, Fred H. Jung and Grace S. Stoermer, constituting the committee appointed by the governor for said investigation, have reported to the board of trustees of Sutter's Fort, which board of trustees has charge of the maintenance and upkeep of said monument, and has recommended that the inscription on the monument setting forth that gold was discovered in California "January 19, 1848" be changed to read "January 24, 1848"; and

WHEREAS, Harry Hanlon, Jo V. Snyder, W. F. Toomey and Donald R. Green, constituting the board of trustees of Sutter's Fort, have submitted the report of said committee to the members of this legislature for their approval and have suggested that official action be taken to declare January 24, 1848, the date upon which gold was discovered in California by James W. Marshall; now, therefore, be it

*Resolved by the assembly, the senate concurring,* That the legislature of the State of California hereby approves the report of said committee which report is made a part of this resolution and finds, declares and recognizes January 24, 1848, as the date upon which gold was discovered in California by James W. Marshall; and be it further

*Resolved,* That the board of trustees of Sutter's Fort is hereby authorized and directed to change the inscription upon the monument erected to the memory of James W. Marshall at Coloma, El Dorado county, so that the correct date of the discovery of gold in California by James W. Marshall will appear thereon.

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Los Angeles, California,  
October 15, 1918.

*To the Board of Trustees of Sutter's Fort,  
Sacramento, California.*

GENTLEMEN:

In accordance with the resolution adopted at the legislative session of 1917, the committee appointed by his excellency the governor, William D. Stephens, "to determine the exact date of the discovery of gold," herewith submit their findings and make formal request to the board of trustees of Sutter's Fort that they take the necessary action to make such change of date effective.

Respectfully,

GRACE S. STOERMER, Secretary.

#### LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL.

Los Angeles, California,  
October 15, 1918.

*To His Excellency, WILLIAM D. STEPHENS,  
Governor, State Capitol, Sacramento, California.*

DEAR SIR:

The commission appointed to determine the exact date of the discovery of gold in California has the honor to herewith transmit the report of its investigation. The commission held two meetings in San Francisco. There were also conferences and correspondence between the members of the commission.

After much research work on the part of Mr. Phil. B. Bekeart, who devoted considerable time to the subject, the commission submits the following report and determines that the correct date is January 24, 1848:

PHILIP BALDWIN BEKEART.

FRED H. JUNG.

GRACE S. STOERMER,  
Secretary.

#### REPORT OF COMMITTEE.

Committee appointed by Governor William D. Stephens to show proof that the date of the discovery of gold at Coloma, Sutter's Mill, as shown on the Marshall statue at Coloma, January 19, 1848, is wrong, and that the correct date is January 24, 1848.

The following report is submitted by Phil. B. Bekeart. He makes no claim for any discovery of the correct date, this date having been proven by the findings of John S. Hittell, the pioneer and historian, in 1885.

James W. Marshall never kept a diary. He attached no historic interest to his discovery at the time it was made. The California Chronicle published a letter February 9, 1856, signed by Marshall, but written by some other person. His



next statement, and over his own signature, appeared in Hutching's California Magazine, Vol. 2, No. 5, November, 1857. This published conversation and interview with Marshall was afterward verified in a letter to John S. Hittell, written by J. W. Hutching, December 28, 1885.

In his statement to Hutching, November, 1857, Marshall says: "On or about the nineteenth of January. I am not quite certain to a day, but it was between the eighteenth and twentieth of that month, 1848." "The first piece which I found weighed about fifty cents."

Marshall states he left for Sutter's Fort four days after his discovery, to show Captain Sutter his find, and to prove its genuineness.

In view of this statement of Marshall's, the nineteenth of January was the accepted date of the discovery until 1885, when John S. Hittell happened to hear that one of Marshall's companions at Sutter's Mill in 1848 still lived in Utah, so he wrote to this man, Henry W. Bigler, St. George, Utah, and sent him a copy of an address that he delivered before the Society of California Pioneers, in San Francisco, September 9, 1885. He asked Bigler if this address agreed with his knowledge of Marshall's discovery, and Bigler replied in a letter dated November 29, 1885, that the date was the twenty-fourth, not the nineteenth.

This diary was afterwards obtained from Bigler, and is, I believe, now a part of the Bancroft library at Berkeley. A facsimile of this diary is in the possession of the Pioneers. It reads:

"Monday 24th. This day some kind of mettle was found in the tail race that looks like goald. First discovered by James Martial the boss of the mill."

General Sutter's diary, now a valued possession of the Society of California Pioneers, records the following few words regarding Marshall:

"Friday, January 28, 1848. Mr. Marshall arrived from the mountains on very important business."

"Saturday, January 29, 1848. Marshall left for the mountains."

Azariah Smith, then a young man of nineteen years, and one of the laborers at Sutter's Mill, also kept a diary. He wrote but once a week (Sunday). His diary, the original of which is in the vaults of the Pioneers, reads as follows:

"Sunday, January 30th. Mr. Marshall having arrived, we got liberty of him and built a small house down by the Mill, and last Sunday we moved into it in order to get rid of the Brawling, Partial Mistress, and cook for ourselves. This week Mr. Marshall found some pieces of (as we all suppose)

Gold, and he has gone to the Fort for the purpose of finding out. It is found in the raceway in small peaces. Some have been found that would weigh five dollars.”

NOTE: This last remark was afterwards explained as follows: Azariah Smith possessed a five-dollar gold piece, and the combined weight of all the flakes picked up by the men weighed about five dollars. There never was a nugget found in the American river at Coloma (Sutter's Mill).—P. B. B.

#### SUMMARY.

Bigler's diary states that Marshall found the gold on Monday, *January 24, 1848.*

Marshall told Hutchings he left for Sutter's Fort, *four days after the discovery.*

Sutter's diary states that Marshall *arrived at the fort on the twenty-eighth.*

Smith's diary of Sunday, the thirtieth, states that Marshall discovered gold *during the week*, and had returned from the fort. If the discovery had been on the nineteenth, Smith would have recorded it on Sunday the twenty-third.

This proves my contention that the date, January 19, 1848, on the Marshall Monument is wrong, and the monument should have the date of discovery January 24, 1848.

(Signed) PHILIP BALDWIN BEKEART,  
Representing Pioneers of California.

We concur in these findings:

(Signed) FRED H. JUNG,  
Representing Native Sons  
of the Golden West.

(Signed) GRACE S. STOERMER,  
Representing Native Daughters  
of the Golden West.

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HENRY W. WRIGHT,  
Speaker of the Assembly.

C. C. YOUNG,  
President of the Senate.

Attest:

FRANK C. JORDAN,  
Secretary of State.



